

So, are we ready to start the egg roll?

Hillary Clinton. Bernie's right here.

The President. Bernie, where's the whistle? This is the one thing every year I know, no matter what else happens, I will do right. [Laughter] Are you ready, kids? Are you ready?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. I'm going to count to three and blow the whistle. One, two, three!

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House volunteer Bernie Fairbanks.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Former Senator George J. Mitchell

April 13, 1998

Possible Visit to Ireland

Q. Mr. President, are you going to make a trip to Ireland?

The President. Well, if it would help, of course I would be willing to go, but I think it's important not to make that decision yet. I haven't had a chance to talk to the two Prime Ministers about it or the leaders of the main parties. If they think I should go—and they've got the biggest stake and the closest sense of the public—I would be happy to do it. But I have not decided to do it, and it's really completely up to them.

Q. Do you think that it might constitute sort of unwarranted interference in their affairs for you to go before the referendums?

The President. That's a decision I want them to make. That's why I said I don't think it's my place, really, to deal with this one way or the other. I'm not going to weigh in on it. I'm always willing to do whatever I can to help, but I don't want to do something that would undermine the chances of success. I want to do whatever I can to increase the chances that the parties themselves and the public now will make a decision.

U.S. Ambassador to Ireland

Q. Are you sending Riley to Ireland?

The President. I have made no decision about the next Ambassador to Ireland. I've made no decision about that.

Q. Why?

The President. Because I haven't. I haven't had time. I've been doing other things.

President's Income Taxes

Q. How much are you paying on your taxes?

The President. A bunch. I don't know. We'll give you the form today.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, could you see yourself naming a successor to Senator Mitchell, a person to be on the ground, a new sort of peace envoy, to help the Irish and the British through a new phase?

The President. No one has even suggested that to me yet. I think what we should all be focused on now is getting the facts of the agreement out to the Irish publics, letting the people in the North and in the Republic vote their convictions, and then see where we are.

As I said, I'm always willing to do whatever I can to help, but the role of the United States here is a supporting role. And to try to help—as I said, we should always try to help create or preserve the environment within which peace can occur and progress, and then encourage the parties that have to make the decisions, including the general public. And so I'm open to that. But there has literally been no discussion of that. Nothing.

Q. Have you seen the agreement yet, and what chances do you give it?

The President. Of course I've seen it. I'm not a handicapper. I want to be encouraging. The important thing is that the public that I saw there in December of '95 in both communities wanted peace. They wanted an honorable peace. They wanted a process by which they could begin to work together. And I think that the agreement that Senator Mitchell has hammered out, that the parties have agreed to, provides them that chance, and I hope that they will seize it.

[At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.]

Q. Do you know at what moment David Trimble changed his mind? And do you have any idea why? Because on Wednesday he said, no deal, he couldn't accept your framework agreement.

Senator Mitchell. There was a process of negotiation which occurred between Wednesday and Friday in which changes were made to the draft document in a manner that led all of the parties to eventually find it acceptable. That's what comes out of negotiation.

Q. But at what point did he say, "Yes, that's it, that's what I was waiting for." Or did he never?

Senator Mitchell. I first knew that the agreement would be approved at 4:45 in the afternoon on Friday when Mr. Trimble called me and said that they were ready to go. We had distributed the agreement in its final form on Friday morning, and I had been in touch with all of the party leaders during the day to inquire as to when they might be ready to go with a final plenary session to vote on the agreement and to approve it.

And of course during those discussions I encouraged them and inquired of them as to whether they would be ready to vote for it. And gradually, over the course of the day, several of them said, we're ready to go now, and we'll vote for it. And at 4:45 p.m., Mr. Trimble called me to say he was ready to go and was prepared to get it done. And so as to make certain that it was done without any further interruption, I called the meeting right then and there.

Q. Would you have gotten the agreement without the input of President Clinton?

Senator Mitchell. I don't think there would have been an agreement without President Clinton's involvement—not beginning this past week but beginning several years ago. I think the President's decisions have been timely, have been critical, and I think it's very important to keep that in mind, that while the President was very actively involved in the concluding negotiations, including staying up all night and making phone calls to many people, including myself, they didn't begin there. They began 5 years ago, and what happened was the culmination of a long process of involvement by the President.

No American President has ever before visited Northern Ireland while in office. No American President has ever before placed the problem of Northern Ireland high on the American agenda at a time when it seemed that there was no prospect for success. It's an easy thing to get involved in an issue when it's on the downhill side and it looks like it's going to succeed. President Clinton got involved in Northern Ireland when no one gave any chance for success.

So the answer is yes, the President's role was critical. I don't think there would have been an agreement without his leadership and participate, and it began many years ago.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:35 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Senator Mitchell, independent chairman of the multiparty talks in Northern Ireland, referred to David Trimble, Ulster Unionist Party leader. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks Announcing the Office of Management and Budget Transition and an Exchange With Reporters

April 14, 1998

The President. In a few moments I am leaving for Houston to speak to the men and women of NASA, visit with America's oldest and newest space hero, Senator John Glenn, and participate tonight in an ESPN townhall on race. But first,

I want to make a personnel announcement about a critical position on our economic team.

For 5½ years, our administration has brought a new vision of stewardship to our economy. We insisted on fiscal discipline, on bringing the deficit down from \$290 billion on the day I